

FVI Project Development Team Meeting #7

Draft Meeting Minutes

June 2, 2005, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Rogue Valley Sanitary Sewer Building

ODOT Present: Debbie Timms (Project Leader), Jerry Marmon (Environmental PM), Brian Sheadel (Roadway), Peter Schuytema (TPAU), James Burford (Bridge), David Pyles (Land Use), Susan Landis (ROW), Christina Fera-Thomas (TPAU), Dale Small (Traffic)

Non-ODOT Present: Jim Wear (City of Phoenix), Jeannell Wyntergreen (City of Phoenix), Dale Petrasek (Jackson County Roads), Vicki Guarino (RVCOG), Dan Moore (RVCOG), Nancy Reynolds (URS)

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The PDT last met in April 2005. The group approved the April minutes.

2. REVIEW OF CAC JUNE 1 MEETING

Vicki Guarino provided a brief overview of last night's CAC meeting (June 1). The CAC had a long meeting, with substantial discussion after reviewing alternatives that had undergone a high-level traffic analysis. There was an understanding that the next steps involve reducing the number of alternatives by critically reviewing how they would function and the impacts they would have. The intent will be for the CAC to recommend which alternatives and options to drop from further consideration, and which to advance into the Environmental Assessment.

The CAC requested that two alternatives be added for evaluation—though there was recognition that it is important, at this time, to begin working with the alternatives that are now on the table. Adding more will prolong the project development process. The CAC recommended that additional traffic information be developed for these two additional alternatives, and that they vote at the next meeting whether to recommend if either should be advanced.

3. REVIEW STATUS OF ALTERNATIVES AND OPTIONS

Jerry Marmon briefly described the two tables that the PDT had received prior to the meeting. There is a summary table of the PDT and CAC alternatives and options, which indicates those that were dropped from further consideration and when. The hatched boxes on the matrix indicate which options work with which alternatives.

The detailed matrix (about 27 pages) identifies the alternatives and options that have been evaluated, their status (which have been dropped and which are currently undergoing evaluation), a description of their features, and reasons the alternatives and options were dropped from further consideration.

4. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Christina Fera-Thomas provided an overview of the existing conditions for the Fern Valley Interchange project and the future year results if no improvements to the interchange and Fern Valley Road were made. Background information was provided in Technical Memorandum #2: Fern Valley Interchange Existing Conditions. This includes information on traffic volumes and crash history.

Crash History

The crash history for I-5 and the interchange indicate that most crashes occur at the interchange ramp terminals. The analysis indicates that 40% of the crashes at the ramp terminals are rear-end, often due to improper gaps. The I-5 crashes are more random. The number of crashes increased over the 5-year period studied, with a noticeable increase in crashes in 2003. It is thought the increase in 2003 may be the result of the installation of traffic signals at the ramp terminals in that year. Most of these crashes were property-damage only.

The crash history on OR 99 from South Stage Road to 1st Street is likely due to the number of accesses, and drivers taking chances to access OR 99 because there are few gaps available. Opportunities to decrease the number of crashes could focus on lowering the speed limit, access management, and making the signal more visible by removing distractions.

OR 99 from the Phoenix north city limits to Bolz is a SPIS site (in the top 10% of crash sites). The crash rate has more than doubled the normal arterial rate. There have been 7 crashes (including 2 fatalities) involving pedestrians in the last 5 years. Most of these crashes involved pedestrians trying to cross mid-block, especially between South Stage Road and Fern Valley Road (likely because there is no place for the pedestrians to cross between the signals, and they don't want to walk to Fern Valley Road or Old South Stage Road to cross OR 99). Installation of a signal with crosswalks could help improve this situation.

Signal Warrants

For all unsignalized intersections, none would meet signal warrants in 2004 or 2030.

Jim Wear asked if sidewalks could be included in this project from Fern Valley Road to Northridge or South Stage. (Part of the problem seems to be associated with transit—people getting off of the bus and needing to cross the street.) Debbie Timms and Jerry Marmon indicated that wherever the roadway is improved with the project, ODOT would consider needed improvements.

5. ANALYSIS OF FUTURE NO-BUILD CONDITIONS

Christina Fera-Thomas provided an overview of anticipated future conditions for the project area under the No-Build Alternative (year 2030). Basically, all of the problems that occur in 2004 are projected to occur in 2030, but would be worse. Along Fern Valley Road, there would be increased queuing backing up the intersections. The intersections of OR 99/Fern Valley Road, N. Phoenix Road, and the ramp terminals would be over volume/capacity (v/c) standards. V/c standards would also be exceeded at S. Stage Road, Glenwood Road, and Northridge Terrace. Because Fern Valley Road will be far over capacity, northbound queues on OR99 would extend south of 1st Street.

6. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF FUTURE YEAR BUILD ALTERNATIVES AND OPTIONS

Peter Schuytema discussed “Technical Memorandum #1A: Revised Fern Valley Interchange First-Level Analysis Results.” The first-level traffic analysis (described in Technical Memorandum #1) had to be updated because of the need to update the future information from 2020 to 2030. It was determined that more volumes were needed to increase the capacity of the model for I-5 (which would make it consistent with other large city models). By assigning more volumes on I-5, the result would be more volumes on Fern Valley Road. This reanalysis resulted in the need to revalidate what was done before—and to revisit whether the alternatives and options screened out before should be reconsidered. Peter wrote Tech Memo #1A, showing changes from Tech Memo #1 in italics.

Interchange Alternative Results

There was no overall change in recommendations due to the reanalysis. However, several projections changed slightly:

- It was determined that, given the changes in traffic numbers, there would be little difference between the Lowry and Lewin SPUIs. Both would be the top-performing SPUI forms.
- With the Partial Cloverleaf, Peter found that the N. Phoenix Road section would be over-capacity—and the problem would be worse than before.
- With the CAC Table 1 SPUI (N. Phoenix Through), N. Phoenix Road would experience a slightly higher v/c ratio, but it still is not projected to be a problem.
- The CAC Table 3 SPUI is now projected to be the worst-performing SPUI (previously the PDT Alternative 1 SPUI was the worst-performing),
- The PDT Alternative 1 SPUI is now the second worst-performing SPUI.
- The South Stage Diamond Interchange would pull slightly more traffic than originally projected, and more segments would be over capacity.

Option Results

There were some changes in Peter’s previous recommendations on options based on the model adjustments. The recommendations to drop Option 4 (Fern Valley Connection to Bolz Lane), Option 6 (Old South Stage Road Oercrossing to North Phoenix), and Option 16 (Fern Valley Connection to 4th Street) were reversed; Peter’s recommendation is now to retain those options for further consideration.

Option 4

There is now determined to be no significant difference in traffic operation between Options 4 (Bolz) and 5 (Fern Valley Connection to Cheryl Avenue). Therefore, any decision between these two options will be simply based on preference. Jim Wear noted that Cheryl has only one connecting street, where Bolz has two connecting streets; this would affect how the local street system would function. There would be more of an increase on Rose with the Cheryl option.

Option 6

With Option 6 (South Stage Road), traffic would be reduced on Fern Valley Road regardless of improvements at the interchange. Jeannell Wyntergreen indicated that Medford said they will try to put an overcrossing or interchange at South Stage. Peter indicated that an interchange at South Stage Road would not meet the Purpose and Need identified for the Fern Valley Interchange. Also, the PDT noted that an interchange at South Stage Road would be too close to the Fern Valley Interchange and the South Medford Interchange.

Jeannell questioned whether the traffic model includes land use. Peter said that the model includes land use in terms of whatever's in the comprehensive plans. The growth areas identified in the RPS process cannot yet be included in the model because they are not yet included in the local plans. Jeannell said that Phoenix is now negotiating on annexing industrial and commercial property for development; and the RPS process is probably another year from being completed. Peter indicated that changes to modeling could occur during the REA process if the RPS planning process is completed and incorporated into existing land use plans.

Option 16

With Option 16 (4th Street), traffic volumes would be reduced on Fern Valley Road by 15%. There would be a 10 to 30% reduction in traffic on OR 99 (due to the direct connection into the center of Phoenix without traffic having to use OR 99). Because of projected future growth on the west side of Phoenix, this option would handle traffic from the interchange very well—and is projected to be the best-performing of the west-end options. However, from the north Phoenix area, traffic traveling north from the interchange would require additional out-of-direction travel. Also, there would be increased traffic on 1st Street and 4th Street (2 to 4 times the No-Build projections). There would be a significant drop in traffic on Bolz and Rose.

Option 16 is only compatible with a SPUI. It would not work with a diamond interchange because the interchange ramps would be too close to allow for proper curvature.

One major issue of concern associated with Option 16 is queuing between the legs of the downtown couplet.

Jim said that the reason the city council and planning commission are interested in analyzing this particular option is that it is anticipated this would focus attention on the city center, stimulating the urban renewal district. He asked whether anything could be done to correct the potential queuing problem. Concern was expressed that this could impact existing businesses on the north end of OR 99 in Phoenix.

Other

Peter said that Option 15 (Northridge Terrace Overcrossing) is now projected to reduce volumes on Fern Valley Road by 15 to 20%. It would pull more traffic than South Stage because it's located closer to Fern Valley.

7. PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF FUTURE YEAR BUILD ALTERNATIVES AND OPTIONS

In this analysis, Christina compared the v/c ratios at major intersections with Fern Valley Road to determine the number of lanes that would be required to handle the projected traffic.

Alternatives—east side analysis

For all of the alternatives, intersection geometry and the number of lanes were created to meet v/c standards. Four alternatives were analyzed: Baseline, Lowry SPUI, Lewin SPUI, and CAC Table 1 SPUI.

Baseline

This would result in large cross-sections at several intersections. A 5-lane cross-section would be required at OR 99, and an 8-lane cross-section would be required at the southbound off-ramp. N. Phoenix Road would not meet signal warrants, creating a major v/c problem. The reason it would not meet signal warrants is that each of the major and minor legs of the intersection would not have an aligned configuration. Because it would not meet signal warrants, a roundabout was analyzed to determine intersection geometry. Without a signal or a roundabout, this intersection would not work. Basically, realignment of N. Phoenix Road is the best way to deal with this intersection; it would then meet signal warrants.

Lowry SPUI

The v/c ratios for the Lowry SPUI would meet v/c standards.

Lewin SPUI

With the realigned Fern Valley Road and N. Phoenix Road, this interchange is now projected to meet signal warrants at N. Phoenix. The heavy left-turn traffic projections result in now meeting these warrants. The v/c ratios are projected to be similar to the Lowry SPUI for the year 2030.

CAC Table 1 SPUI

The v/c ratio would drop at N. Phoenix and Fern Valley Road. This interchange, along with the Lewin SPUI, would be better for truck traffic in this quadrant.

Options—west side analysis

The options considered in this analysis were the existing Fern Valley location (Ray's market), Cheryl Avenue, Bolz Lane, and 4th Street.

Existing

With the existing west end connection, the v/c ratios would exceed standards at two locations (1st Street and 4th Street).

Bolz

To make this intersection with OR 99 work would require dual left-turn lanes—basically, a large intersection. This assumes a couplet with two lanes in each direction. The v/c would drop at 4th Street, but would be over the v/c standard at 1st Street.

Cheryl

This intersection would be similar in configuration to Bolz; however, the v/c ratios would exceed standards at both 1st Street and 4th Street.

4th Street

This option would noticeably reduce the size of the intersections required to handle the traffic. Signal warrants on the couplet would be met. This option would have the best v/c ratios. It is anticipated that this option could probably have two signals initially, and then two more signals could be added later. This option would require 4 lanes between 1st and 4th Streets—and parking would need to be removed in this area. The signals could probably be phased in over 25 years.

This option could be positive for urban renewal because a lot of businesses on the east side would be re-developable. It's possible that parking locations could be identified in the future.

The biggest problem with this option is the signals at the 4th Street couple legs. The couplet legs are very close together in this area.

An additional problem associated with this option is Bicentennial Park--the wetland park area along Bear Creek Drive; this is a 4-acre park conservation area from Main to Bear Creek Road. Land and Water Conservation Funds were used for this area; therefore, it is a Section 6(f) and 4(f) property. This is a problem for options that consider use of this area.

Dan Moore questioned whether Bear Creek Drive could be made 2-way; if Bear Creek Drive could be used as the through movement, allowing the downtown to be more pedestrian-friendly with reduced traffic on OR 99. He questioned what would occur if the couplet were removed.

8. PDT ACTIONS ON ALTERNATIVES AND OPTIONS

No actions were required for the alternatives because the recommendations didn't change from the previous analysis. After reviewing the CAC recommendations, the PDT acted on the options as shown below.

Option 4 (Bolz)

The PDT had already indicated they wanted to keep this option for further analysis.

Option 6 (South Stage Overcrossing)

The PDT voted to keep this option (6 votes in support).

Option 16 (4th Street Connection)

The PDT voted to keep this option (5 votes to keep; 1 vote to drop—due to environmental concerns and economic impacts to the downtown city center).

8. PDT REVIEW OF NEW CAC OPTIONS

The CAC raised two new options as possibilities: Fern Valley Cheryl/Bolz couplet (a one-way westbound along Fern Valley to Cheryl and a one-way eastbound from Bolz across Bear Creek and reconnecting to Fern Valley at about Luman) and the Modified Bolz Connection (a 2-way connection to Bolz, with a cul-de-sac connection from Cheryl to the northwest interchange quadrant).

Fern Valley, Cheryl/Bolz couplet

The Fern Valley, Cheryl/Bolz couplet could provide right-in/right-out access to Bear Lake Estates at Luman. This is intended to split traffic, and reduce the impacts at the OR 99 connections. The PDT voted not to forward this option (1 vote for and 5 against) for further traffic analysis because it would be difficult operationally and require greater amounts of out-of-direction travel.

Modified Bolz Connection

It was determined that the Modified Bolz Connection was actually an access management strategy for the Bolz option. The traffic analysis has not been developed at this level of detail at this time. The PDT felt this connection would be evaluated at a later time for Bolz, and that no formal vote is needed at this time.

NEXT MEETING:

The next PDT meeting is planned for July 7, 2005. The CAC is being polled to determine their availability for the July 6, 2005 meeting date.

The goal of the next CAC and PDT meetings will be to filter down the options on the west and east side. The intent will be to identify the preferred east-west option at Northridge or South Stage, to vote on the west side options (Cheryl, Bolz and 4th Street) and on the east side options (Lowry SPUI, Lewin SPUI, CAC Table 1 SPUI).